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Russian Politicians Launch Witch Hunt Against Founder of The Moscow Times

By Jennifer Monaghan

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Derk Sauer

Derk Sauer, the Dutchman who founded The Moscow Times in 1992, should be forced to leave his current job as president of the RBC news agency, a nationalist firebrand Russian politician has been quoted as saying.

Vladimir Zhirinovsky said his LDPR party would ask the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, to remove Sauer from his position at the business news agency because it is important that the country's media is headed by Russians, the Regnum news site reported Friday.

“He's been living in our country for 25 years. You have to wonder: Why are you living in a foreign country? I couldn't live in the Netherlands for five days. He has latched on like a boil. His leadership of RBC is having a negative influence," Zhirinovsky was quoted as saying, complaining that RBC frequently cited Russian analysts who have moved abroad and voiced

opposition to the current regime.

It was not immediately clear on what legal foundation Zhirinovsky intended to base his complaint. RBC is a private company whose majority stake is owned by Russian billionaire entrepreneur Mikhail Prokhorov.

Zhirinovsky's outburst came the day after Yelizaveta Osetinskaya, editor-in-chief at RBC, won a prize in the electronic media category at Russia's Media Manager awards.

Sauer, 62, moved to the Soviet Union in 1989. He founded The Moscow Times three years later, using it as a base to build up Independent Media, a major newspaper and magazine publishing business. He sold his media empire to Finnish publishing giant Sanoma in 2005, while staying on as the company's CEO and later chairman of its supervisory board until becoming president of RBC in late 2013. He was not in Moscow and unavailable for comment Friday, his aide Irina Tokareva told The Moscow Times.

Zhirinovsky told reporters that his party would be willing to take part in protests against the Dutchman, and that its ultimate aim was for Sauer to leave Russia, Regnum reported.

The notoriously rabble-rousing veteran politician's comments about Sauer came days after rallies were held against the publishing tycoon earlier this week, with demonstrators gathering Tuesday outside RBC's offices on Profsoyuznaya Ulitsa in southern Moscow with placards saying “Down With Sauer,” and “Russian Media, Russian Director,” the LifeNews tabloid news agency reported at the time.

“It [RBC] is an extremely important media outlet that defines the position of business. And it is headed by a citizen of NATO, whose main task is to organize crises and sanctions in Russia,” Duma Deputy Yevgeny Fyodorov, who was present at the protests, was quoted as saying in the report.

Fyodorov, a deputy with the ruling United Russia party who like Zhirinovsky is known for his provocative, fervently anti-Western statements, told LifeNews that the protesters would continue to picket the RBC building until Sauer resigned.

Marina Tavruyeva, a receptionist at RBC, told The Moscow Times that while about 150 people had gathered outside the offices on Tuesday, there had been no gatherings on Wednesday or Thursday. No protesters were outside the building as of midday Friday, she added.

The government moved to curb the influence of foreigners on Russian media last year by passing a law that limits foreign ownership of media assets to 20 percent by the beginning of 2017.

The demands for Sauer's dismissal come days after an American professor working at a central Russian university was dismissed from his post, after being accused of working against Russia's interests by a state-run television channel host.

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